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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

MEMORANDUM

To Principals of Collegiate Institutes, Vocational, High and Continuation Schools

Re Departmental Examinations in Upper School English

1. THE ENGLISH LITERATURE EXAMINATION OF 1945

The following information in regard to the work of the candidates at the Upper School examination of 1945 in English Literature is presented in the hope that it may prove helpful to teachers of English in the secondary schools. It is to be understood that the allotment of marks to the several parts of the course and the comments upon the candidates' answers apply only to this examination and that neither the scale of valuations nor the form of questions will necessarily be duplicated in future examinations in the subject.

The answer papers were evaluated on the basis of 100 marks, which were divided as follows: Shakespeare—26; Longer Poems—24; Shorter Poems—12; Short Stories and Essays—10; Under the Greenwood Tree—12; Sight Poetry—16.

I. Form of Answers

It remains important that answers should be properly spaced, accurately numbered for parts and sub-parts and written in a legible and reasonably large script.

A considerable number of candidates lost time by preparing their answers in detail on the unlined pages as rough work and afterwards transcribing them almost verbatim to the lined pages. It should not be necessary to use the unlined pages except for brief notes or outline plans for the answers. If any rough work, which has not been transcribed, is to be evaluated by the examiner,

that fact should be clearly indicated by the candidate. Examiners are expected to read rough work only if an answer appears unfinished for lack of time. Candidates who have had regular training in writing on formal examinations during the school year not only in Grade XIII but in the lower grades are at a distinct advantage with respect to prompt and effective organization of their answers at a departmental examination in English Literature.

In the preparation of the examination care was taken to secure a well-balanced and representative arrangement of the questions. It was, therefore, difficult for a candidate who omitted one or more questions to secure a high grade. Candidates sometimes did excellent work in the first half of the paper but were then so hurried that the quality of their answers greatly deteriorated and needless errors in spelling and syntax occurred.

II. Errors in Spelling

As formerly, deductions to a maximum of ten were made for errors in spelling. Many errors were due to carelessness and frequently the simplest words were misspelled. Care should be taken in the use of the apostrophe and the hyphen. In a survey of 1,000 papers it was found that the standing of 35 candidates was endangered by mistakes in spelling.

III. Faulty Usage

Candidates should understand that while excellence of style is not demanded the answers should be written in clear, correct English and that errors in sentence structure, bad grammar, persistent lack of punctuation, conspicuous neglect of capitals, and serious misuse of words result in loss of marks.

IV. Notes on the Answers

Question 1:

Although the quotation used stated clearly the three problems to be discussed, overlapping and confusion were found in the answers, with a tendency to tell the story rather than to deal with the question. The dramatic reality of the play and the technique displayed by the dramatist in the opening scene should be well understood.

It continues to be important that the classroom study of a play of Shakespeare be intensive enough to lead to an understanding of the dramatist's methods. The careful interpretation of character and the evaluation of other elements in the design and construction of the play are also necessary to genuine appreciation.

Question 2:

(a) The word selected frequently was not one that is actually obsolete.

(b) This required that two words that were used in Shakespeare's time and continue in use be explained but sometimes one or both of the words selected was obsolete.

Through failure to read the question closely candidates lost marks by confusing the meaning of parts (a) and (b).

(c) This was usually done satisfactorily but there was some lack of understanding of the terms metaphor and simile. Accordingly, incorrect examples of these were presented.

N.B.—A Shakespeare Glossary by C. T. Onions (Oxford Press) is a helpful book of reference which should be available for the use of Upper School classes in English.

The study of special features of the diction will often add meaning and interest to the play and should enlarge the general knowledge of the pupils. It should not, however, be carried on to the point of dullness or drudgery.

Question 3:

(a) *dead thoughts*—thoughts which produced no effect, brought no action.

quicken a new birth—bring to life a new order of society.

unawakened earth—earth which is not yet awake to its needs and possibilities.

There was considerable misunderstanding of the exact meaning intended by Shelley. Precision and clarity are important in the explanation of quoted passages.

(b) "If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?"

The answers were sometimes a presentation of personal ideas rather than an explanation of Shelley's point of view.

Question 4:

In the first option candidates frequently failed to note that the point of the question was the purely medical diagnosis of the case of Lazarus as given by Karshish. When possible, some credit was given for discussion of the changed mental outlook of Karshish. Candidates should be careful to grasp the exact meaning of a question.

In the second option the information given did not always exemplify the scientific interest of Karshish.

Question 5:

(a) Candidates should be careful to make an actual comparison when one is called for by the question. The word "compare" was understood to mean a treatment of both the similarities and the differences in regard to the two features of Morte D'Arthur and Sohrab and Rustum which the candidate selected for discussion.

The instructions to the examiners were as follows:

"This question should be answered in the form of a little essay that deals with whatever two of the four points listed the candidate may choose. Examiners should be careful, as in Question 1, to disregard everything in an answer which does not stick closely to what the candidate is dealing with. No credit should be given for merely showing acquaintance with the content of the poem or poems. There must be a *comparison* of the poems in two of the following respects: beauty of rhythm; use of striking pictures; impression of reality left with the reader; adaptation of nature to the purposes of the poem. To get a good mark a candidate should show by definite references to details in each poem that he understands what he is writing about."

(b) (i) The conflicting arguments in the mind of Bedivere were required for full marks. Many candidates dealt only with the arguments for *not* throwing Excalibur away.

(ii) The incident in Sohrab and Rustum chosen to illustrate the idea in the quotation was not always one that was well suited to this purpose.

Question 6:

The answers were weakest in the discussion of the effective use of metre in the poem chosen. A good deal of what was said about the metre was mere guesswork and the term "iambic pentameter" was used with abandon. *Candidates should have definite knowledge of at least the elements of versification.*

Allowance was made in the marking for variation in the importance of metre, diction, ideas and story in the different poems named.

Credit could not be given if the candidate merely retold the story; he was required to *appraise* it in terms of metre, diction, ideas and story.

Question 7:

Distinctive merits which candidates could be expected to point out and illustrate by definite references in the respective short stories are indicated by the following outlines used for the guidance of the examiners:

The Garden Party is notable for its presentation of ordinary everyday happenings, the so-called 'slice-of-life', as seen by a sympathetic observer; for its realistic and sympathetic presentation of ordinary characters; for its underlying suggestion that the existing social order is unsatisfactory and disturbing to a wholesome young person like Laura. Finally, the style, which seems so easy and even artless, is one of the chief merits of the story in that it makes it easy and pleasant for one to read on and on. The fact that everything occurs on the one day and at or near the one place helps to give a unity of impression to the story.

A Municipal Report is a successful example of the short story that uses every incident to produce a pre-conceived single effect. O. Henry obviously begins with the idea that romance is to be found in the most unlikely places. He emphasizes this idea by contrasting the dull, matter-of-fact statements in the municipal report with what actually happens in Nashville. Every incident contributes to the development of the plot that culminates in the successful murder. The story is notable for its unity of tone and effect, its sharp contrast of humdrum commercial statistics and romantic story, and its close-knit plot in which every incident and character is designed to get the story forward to its dramatic climax.

Credit was also given when candidates were able to point out and illustrate distinctive merits other than those noted in the above outlines.

Question 8:

Candidates who gained good marks on this question displayed not only an adequate knowledge of the events and the principal characters in the early chapters of "Under the Greenwood Tree" but also ability to show how the two themes mentioned in the quotation are *combined*. Marks were lost through failure to present the information in a manner that showed an understanding of the main idea of the question.

Question 9:

The sight question is a valuable means of testing because it frequently affords an examiner a definite opportunity to judge the ability of a candidate. Regular practice in sight work as an aid to independent thinking in the study of literature is desirable in the lower grades as well as in Grade XIII.

It is essential that candidates read the sight selection with thoughtful concentration. They should understand that full marks cannot be given for answers which deal only with superficial aspects of the poem.

Many candidates apparently have no standard by which to appraise the worth or merits of a poem. They should know that a poem ought to be examined for (a) quality of the thought, (b) appeal to the emotions and to the imagination, (c) beauty of expression, (d) evidence of form or pattern, and not merely for literary devices, if they are to write a real appreciation.

2. THE ENGLISH COMPOSITION EXAMINATION OF 1945

The information presented here for the use of teachers of this subject must not be taken as an indication either of the exact

allotment of marks, or the choice of the parts of the course for examination, at any future time. However, 60 marks is prescribed for the essay part of the paper.

The standards set for the essay were all designed to discover whether the candidate had learned to write. Essays containing major errors of different types or frequent minor errors would fail unless there were compensating merits.

The following is a list of most of the major errors. It should be noted that these errors were penalized in all the work on the paper, not just in the essay. They are: serious errors in paragraphing; careless shifts in number, person, or tense; dangling participles or infinitives; lack of agreement between subject and predicate; pronouns with indefinite or incorrect antecedents; more than one illiteracy or crudity; incorrect case; faulty sentence structure, such as,—incomplete sentence (except when effective); incoherent, confused, or run-on sentence; "when", etc., clauses for subjective completions; comma blunder (unless the connection between the clauses is very close); mixed sentence; "and which", etc., clauses wrongly subordinated; faulty subordination; lack of unity. These errors might be considered as minor if there was other evidence in the work to show the writer's general competence.

Essays comparatively free from errors but commonplace might receive from 30 to 35 marks.

Essays which were still commonplace but revealed some power of organization and had some merit in either content or style might receive from 36 to 39 marks.

Those in the next higher grade, 40 to 44 marks, showed merit in style or content, were competently handled, and were somewhat interesting.

We now come to essays from 45 to 60 marks, that is, first class honour work in this part of the paper. These essays showed merit in content and style. They did not need to be brilliant, but those written plainly and in a straightforward style, if interesting, would be considered in this group. If the essay could be called attractive, meritorious, if it had good content, and indicated some consciousness of word values and of effective sentence structure, it would receive from 45 to 50. If there was decided excellence in either content or style, such as a comprehensive and intimate knowledge of subject matter, freshness of thought, skill in arrangement, command of sentence structure, or consciousness of word values, the essay would receive from 51 to 55. If all these excellencies were present and the essay showed distinction and individuality in style the mark could be from 56 to 60, and it is cheering to note that 60 marks were given, not once, but several times.

II. Defining Words

Fifteen marks were given for defining and using the five words. Complete sentences or formal definition were not required. If,

however, the candidate attempted a complete sentence he was required to do it correctly. The word must not be defined in terms of itself; for example "Fabulous, like a fable" was of no value. A wrong definition added to a correct one cancelled the value of the correct one. The definition had to be consistent with the grammatical value of the word.

Examples of Marking in Question 2:

dilemma—quandary, uncertain what to do—1 mark (one noun, one adjective).

dilemma is a noun which refers to mind or thoughts only. It means your thoughts and mind being in state of confusion—0 marks.

unique—sole, without like or equal, unequalled, matchless—2 marks. Singular, exceptional, uncommon, original, different, out of the ordinary, were given 0 marks unless there was further qualification of the meaning by word or phrase.

Any dictionary meaning of a word was accepted.

One mark was given for each sentence in which the chosen word was used idiomatically.

III. The Appreciation

In order to obtain the full 15 marks allowed for matter the candidate must discuss all the points mentioned in the question and given definite references. Three marks were allowed for a good discussion of each point, but if one or two points were discussed very fully, up to five marks might be allowed for each of these.

Under Unity the candidate should point out the topic-sentence or the central theme and should show the relation of the sentences to that central theme.

Under Sentence Structure he should note the clarity, smoothness, ease, and variety of the sentences, and might indicate examples of variation between short and long sentences, between loose and periodic structure, and instances of parallelism and repetition.

Under Paragraph Structure the candidate might show (a) how the theme is developed and how the development is made clear to the reader (coherence); (b) the amount of space devoted to each point according to its importance (proportion); (c) the means used to emphasize the main points, particularly at the beginning and the end (emphasis).

Under Language these might be noted: the simplicity, clearness, and precision of the words chosen, the lightness of touch, the absence of pedantry and dullness, the slightly old-fashioned flavour of "complaisance", "impertinent", and "of all things."

The comment on Thought might be that it is a blend of common sense and human nature, and that the outlook is that of a well-bred

man of the world whose experience has convinced him that the art of pleasing is based on consideration of others.

Ten marks were allowed for good style in the appreciation question. The blunderers who wrote a précis instead of what they were told to do might be allowed a maximum of eight marks on the style of their work.

The following has been chosen as an example of an appreciation; this answer was awarded twelve marks for matter and eight marks for style.

> "This selection is an exposition on the art of pleasing, while there is a continuity of thought throughout the paragraph which perhaps justifies its construction as one single paragraph on pleasing, yet I feel that possibly it might be divided into three shorter paragraphs. Sentence one to sentence five would be paragraph one, on how to learn about what pleases others. Sentence six to sentence ten on how to act in company and sentence eleven as the third paragraph on advice on arguments. There is a definite change from what would be my paragraph one to the advice given in paragraph two. Perhaps the fact that it is in a letter also gives a reason for it being placed as one paragraph distinct from others on another topic.
>
> The author's sentences are mostly compound, as in sentences one, two, four and six; with some compound-complex as in sentences seven and eleven. He uses many noun clauses as subjects and objects as in sentences three, four, five and nine. Most of the sentences are imperative and a few are assertive.
>
> The opening sentence of the paragraph is good because it presents a problem, in the difficulty of acquiring the art, for us to tackle. The paragraph is slightly long and as mentioned might better have been broken up into smaller paragraphs. The concluding sentence does not sum up the thought of the passage and this leads us to expect more.
>
> The author seems to have been a little more educated than average because of his mastery of words. While he uses some words, such as complaisance and egotism which are a little out of the ordinary, most of the words are common and easily understood.
>
> The author points out one of the common errors of our civilization, that of dominating a conversation, and stresses listening as a virtue. He also strongly stresses modesty.
>
> All considered, however, the passage is well written and contains some very much needed advice."